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14. ABSTRACT

To truly understand an adversary it requires more than good intelligence on the battlefield. It requires a detailed understanding of culture and a holistic approach to utilizing both hard and soft power methods within the government and military. English discussion groups conducted by the U.S. military will enable a greater understanding of culture. A simple dialogue between people, not "soldiers", can not only educate the world on truly how great the United States is but also teach the military how great the world is. This understanding of different cultures will change mindsets and reveal a deeper understanding of the culture. These discussions groups should not depend on conflict. As the focus and presence of the U.S. shifts to Asia, a new opportunity exists for the military to engage with emerging nations in bilateral training and knowledge sharing. The spread of military soft power in Asia could result in new markets and a greater partnership in the region. In a worst case scenario, this greater understanding of culture will be supremely beneficial if hard power options become necessary.

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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

TITLE: ENGLISH DISCUSSION GROUPS: A MEANS FOR THE MILITARY TO

UNDERSTAND CULTURE.

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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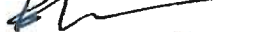**AUTHOR: LIEUTENANT COMMANDER DANE BERENSEN, UNITED STATES
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Executive Summary

Title: English Discussion Groups: A means for the Military to understand culture.

Author: Lieutenant Commander Dane Berensen, United States Navy

Thesis: The U.S. military should expand its support for English discussion groups as a cost effective means of establishing better rapport with host country nationals and gain a greater understanding of the local culture that will enhance military operations in the region.

Discussion: The great Sun Tzu challenges us to know yourself and know your enemy. The U.S. military does a good job knowing itself. The training, tactics, it limitations and strengths on the battlefield are known and incorporated in doctrine. To know the enemy is much more challenging and requires a whole of government approach as recently specified in National strategy.   This new strategy, compounded with a global threat and budgetary cutbacks, create a new paradigm for the military that makes knowing the enemy essential.

To truly understand an adversary requires more than good intelligence on the battlefield. It requires a detailed understanding of culture and a holistic approach to utilizing both hard and soft power methods within the government and military. The war in Afghanistan has revealed that the military began with an ignorant view of the Afghan and largely the Muslim culture. True cultural understanding does not come from books or pre-deployment classes; cultural understanding comes from willing engagement, dialogue and interaction within the culture. This cultural interaction reveals the true identity of members within that society. This level of understanding will begin to break down the walls of prejudice and negative perceptions that accumulate between diverse cultures. This cultural understanding will ultimately change the course of a conflict to achieve success or better yet, avoid conflict altogether.

English discussion groups, conducted by the military, will enable a greater understanding of diverse cultures. A simple dialogue between people, not "soldiers", can not only educate the world on truly how great the United States is but also teach the military how great the world is. This understanding of new cultures will change mindsets and reveal a deeper understanding of culture. These discussions groups should not depend on conflict. As the focus and presence of the U.S. shifts to Asia, a new opportunity exists for the military to engage with emerging nations in bilateral training and knowledge sharing. The spread of military soft power in Asia could result in new markets and a greater partnership in the region. In a worst case scenario, this greater understanding of culture will be supremely beneficial if hard power options become necessary.

Conclusion: The world is changing, the budget is decreasing, the threat to U.S. interests continues. Globalization requires a deeper understanding of the world to remain competitive.

The understanding, gained from English discussion groups, will not only help train units in theater to be more culturally aware but this understanding will filter up to senior level commanders with alternative options in campaign plans that could be the difference between protracted conflict or a thriving partnership. English discussion groups provide an opportunity for the local population to understand U.S. operations in the region and more importantly reinforce the need for local support for the host government. Prolonged discussions with the local population will foster trust in the partnership and ultimately provide insight into the will of the people. If America is to decline it will not be because of its culture or economy, it will be because of its ignorance.

DISCLAIMER

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Preface

During my brief deployment to Djibouti I observed a gross disconnect between the will and needs of the local population and the objectives of the military. This disconnect was not malicious or due to any lack of effort. Countless man-hours and resources were poured into the mission of the CJTF-HOA. The breakdown was not a result of capability but of culture. The high paced operations resulted in progress vice effectiveness. I feel strongly that the military can gain insight and an advantage from this cultural exchange that will not only result in success on the battle field but also success in the minds of people throughout the world.

I would like to acknowledge my mentor, Dr. Francis Marlo, for his mentorship and patience during this project. He was able to encourage and expand my thoughts into ideas and ideas ultimately into words. For this I am grateful.

Finally I would like to thank my loving wife Jennifer. She has been a constant source of strength and encouragement throughout my career and epically during this paper. Her selfless devotion and dedication to me and the Navy has enabled all my successes. She is truly my soul mate, encourager and best friend.

Introduction

"Know your enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril"

The great Sun Tzu boasts that to know the enemy and to know oneself will result in victory on the battle field. Can it be this simple? This maxim seems to cast away traditional tools of warfare and simplify the fundamental premise of conflict. Know yourself and know your enemy. How can a simple statement written in 500 B.C. be so lacking in current U.S. policy and military actions? The greatest struggle facing the U.S. military over the past 4 decades has been truly understanding its adversaries. A key to knowing an adversary is understanding its culture.

Cut backs in the DoD budget will require a simpler and more visionary approach to accomplishing the dynamic mission of the military services. The military will need to utilize cost effective methods to accomplish greater results on and off the battlefield. With few exceptions, the nation's wars, conflicts and military operations have taken place in non-English speaking areas of the world. Though the military is highly diverse and able to support a vast

"Gentlemen, we have run out of money. It's time to start thinking."

Sir Ernest Rutherford

range of operations, from traditional kinetic missions to large scale Humanitarian Aid/Disaster Relief (HA/DR) roles, the predominant perception throughout the world is the U.S. military is a hostile force. This perception is beneficial during times of conflict or security missions but creates a problem during diplomacy and nation building. To overcome this problem, the U.S. military should expand its support for English discussion groups as a cost effective means of establishing better rapport with host country nationals and gain a greater understanding of the

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local culture that will enhance military operations in the region. This paper will discuss how English discussion groups will support national strategy and partnerships with the interagency, support both soft and hard elements of national power as well as outline the importance of a deep understanding of culture. The purpose of this paper is to outline how these tactical discussion groups support a strategic and operational focus that will enable the military to gain insight and understanding into foreign cultures. Understanding various cultures and social interactions is the cornerstone of successful military operations.

U.S. National Strategy

> "As President of the United States, I will work tirelessly to protect America's security and to advance our interests… That is why America seeks an international system that lets nations pursue their interests peacefully, especially when those interests diverge; a system where the universal rights of human beings are respected, and violations of those rights are opposed; a system where we hold ourselves to the same standards that we apply to other nations, with clear rights and responsibilities for all."[1] —President Barack Obama, Moscow, Russia, July 7, 2009

A strategic shift in U.S. policy has outlined an increase in coordination among agencies within the executive branch. The National Security Strategy (NSS) outlines several specific objectives that require a deeper knowledge and collaboration with agencies within the U.S. government. In 2011, the President outlined the nation's international focus: strong alliances, cooperation with other 21st century centers of influence, institutions and mechanisms for cooperation, and broad cooperation on key global challenges. The President has clearly articulated a strong vision of cooperation in his international policy. "To effectively craft and implement a sustainable, results-oriented national security strategy, there must be effective cooperation between the branches of government."[2] The 9/11 Commission Report found many failures that led to the attack and sought to build a unity of effort across the U.S. government.

"The strategy we have recommended is elaborate… To implement it will require a government better organized than the one that exists today."[3]

The size of the National Security Council (NSC) has quadrupled since 1970 in an effort to better structure the executive branch to meet emerging global threats. The NSC is the principal forum for considering national security and foreign policy matters for the President. The last Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR) outlined specific recommendations to better strengthen national security policy. These changes include an interagency collaboration on foreign policy objectives and improvements in U.S. national security with a whole-of government approach. The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) outlines an extensive focus to strengthening relationships within the interagency as well as key relationships abroad. A recurring theme throughout these strategic documents is to remove the stovepipe methodology and develop greater interagency operability and cooperation. This increased governmental interoperability will require a greater understanding of the diverse and complex cultures resident within each agency.

Interaction between Instruments of National Power

The United States uses several instruments of national power to achieve strategic objectives. These instruments of national power an effective means to influence foreign powers and governments. The elements of national power can be categorized as soft power and hard power. "Hard power is loosely defined as compelling your adversary to comply with

Soft power is about attracting your partner to share your goals through dialogue and exchange."[4] The instruments of national power are diplomacy, information, military and economy (DIME). The Information and Economic facets are valuable

elements of DIME, but this paper will focus primarily on the Diplomatic and Military elements.

Over the past decade, diplomacy and the military has become a source of hard power – increased

military action, sanctions, embargos and demarches. These hard power options are effective

tools, but little is made of the intangibles and the less-pointed aspects of soft power – sharing the

American ideal. If the true objective is to influence the actions or intentions of a national actor,

> *"Soft power came in the Marshall Plan. Soft power came with American GIs*
>
> *who put their weapons down once the war was over and helped all those nations*
>
> *rebuild. We did the same thing in Japan."*
>
> *Former Security of State Colin Powell*

then influence is better achieved by soft power than hard power. Aspects of American culture

constantly influence global markets as an instrument of business, but are often overlooked as an

instrument in projecting national policy. After World War II, the U.S. emerged from its sleepy

isolationist viewpoint and began to take on a larger role in the world. Reconstruction efforts in

Germany and Japan jumpstarted increased partnerships and the spread of U.S. foreign policy

throughout Europe and Asia using the soft power aspects that made America great. Soft power

was the primary tool in the reconstruction of Germany and Japan.[5]

The word" influence" has taken on a negative connotation. It implies that something or

someone is manipulating someone else to do something they would not normally do as a direct

result of influence. Though this definition is partially accurate, it is also misleading. The greater

opportunity of influence is to reach an arrangement between two parties that is achieved by

greater willingness and understanding. This is not to say that hard power attributes are not

essential, but only to illustrate that soft power aspects are underutilized and can be rejuvenated.

In the binary construct of the military and diplomacy, soft power tends to imply only the diplomatic element, while hard power is resident with the military. This is simply not the case. Today, as illustrated in our national strategy, both hard and soft power elements are derived from diplomacy and the military. The purpose of these instruments of national power is to influence, compel, persuade, coerce, incentivize and ultimately force an adversary or potential adversary to comply with the will and interest of the United States.

Now that the DIME construct has been simplified to just the diplomatic and military aspects, it is easier to see the relationship between the two. The example of military Combatant Commands (COCOMs) will be used to illustrate the complexities and interconnectivity of hard and soft power. Each COCOM has a US State Department (DoS) representatives working within the staff as an advisor to the COCOM commander. The Political Advisors (POLAD) represents the State Department interests within that geographical region and advises the military commander based on key events. One area in which the POLAD plays an important role is in the allocation of DoD and CERP funds to military commanders for nation reconstruction projects. The projects include schools, medical clinics, bridges roads port facilities and others. Many of these projects require DoS support for establishment and sustainment. This simple example illustrates the complicated and integrated aspects of diplomacy within the military construct. Conversely, there are military contingents embedded in each embassy working directly for the Ambassador as a liaison for military operations in country. These types of operations within an embassy or a COCOM occur consistently and are not bound by peace or conflict. The relationships with the interagency, the military and the local population, according to national strategy, are increasing. The future success to these operations is predicated on cultural understanding.

The importance of perception

A significant limiting factor in projecting national policy is perception. Currently the U.S. holds a negative perception in parts of the world especially in the Middle East. The current events in Afghanistan, the war and occupation of Iraq, the continued support of Israel, the global war on terror and the unilateral actions on the world's stage create a divisive argument of several Muslim nations.[6] Unilateral action conducted by the U.S. in addition to the war in Iraq, creates a perception that the U.S. only acts in their best interest. The invasion of a resource rich country created the perception in the world that the "E" in DIME represents "exploitation" vice "economic." It is essential to not only understand this perception but to counter and explain events that occur.

Two independent polls show that anti-American feeling in Arab nations is at an all-time high. It's not just that feelings are running against the US, it's that Arabs and Muslims are "giving up on [the US] – on our ability to make good decisions, to solve problems, to play the role of honest broker."[7] This poll precedes recent major events in Afghanistan that continue to disrupt the balance between the U.S. and the Muslim world. Over a decade after 9/11 and the removal of Osama bin Laden, views throughout the Middle East and South Asia remain hostile toward the United States.[8] These events continue to illustrate the lack of cultural understanding between two dissimilar societies. The good news is that 67 percent of those surveyed said that the US could substantially repair its image if it brokered peace in the region, but commentators in the region doubt that the US will do this. The Gulf Times of Qatar reports that 84 percent of those surveyed in the Zogby poll believe that the war in Iraq has created more, not fewer, terrorists, while 86 percent believe that there has been "less peace" in the region since the removal of Saddam Hussein.[9] In order to repair its image, the U.S. must make the effort to cross

the bridge between the two dissimilar cultures. The U.S. must continue to be transparent in its actions and reiterate its commitment in the region.

The difference in culture must be understood in order to transcend animosities. The search for common ground has not taken place. This creates the perception of it is "our way or the highway." The Zogby poll shows an interesting perception that is prevalent in the region, namely that the presence of the U.S. in Iraq and Afghanistan is creating the very insurgents the U.S. is trying to eliminate. For the purpose of this paper, the validity of this statement is irrelevant. A large element of this conflict is perceptions. The U.S. strategy must evaluate the perceptions of Afghans, perceptions of Muslim nations in the region and perceptions of the U.S. population. Regardless of what media broadcasts in response to events, the outcome to the occupied country is perceived as propaganda and is discounted or acts as a means to fracture an already tenuous relationship. To improve the perception of its actions in the region, the U.S. must find common ground with the local population.

An example of this "common ground" found through dialogue was an outhouse project in the Philippines. Several years ago in the remote southern islands near Mindanao, the JSOTF commander realized a growing strain between the local villagers and the Philippine military. The Philippine military was trying to get information on activity of terrorist cells in the area, but the local population was uncooperative. The local villages did not trust the military and was tired of their frequent inquiries in the villages. A "common ground" was needed for the military and the local population to trust each other and work together to achieve a solution for both parties. The solution came in the form of outhouses. Local infrastructure was non-existent and the locals were getting sick from the poor sewer networks and polluted water. The Philippine military agreed to build outhouses along a busy trading route in the exchange for cooperation of

the local villagers on terrorist activity. Within months, a network of outhouses constructed by

the Philippine military dotted the busy trade route. This project was so successful that the

terrorist networks were forced to move operations because of the close partnership between the

Philippine military and the local population.

Importance of Culture

There are many different definitions of culture circulating in the text-books. The

overarching theme of culture is the shared patterns of behaviors and interactions acquired

through understanding that are learned through a society. These shared patterns over time

identify the members of a group or conversely distinguish members of other groups. Culture is a

broad brush description of a very complex relationship that takes place within societies.   To

> *"We celebrate the culture in which we operate."*
> *General John R. Allen, USMC, Commander ISAF - Afghanistan*

understand the importance of culture, a deeper analysis must examine what aspects comprise or

influence culture. What generates these patterns of behaviors? What determines these

interactions? To determine the shared patterns and interactions one must look to the individuals

within the society. The identity of these individuals will define their interaction within the group

in which they live. All societies are comprised of individuals that interact or influence the other

members of that group. Identity defines the individual within any group and subsequently

develops bonds with similar-minded members within that group. There are two forms of

identity: individual and salient.

An individual identity defines a person by the roles they develop within a society.

Consider, for example Bob - a father, a husband, a son, a soldier, a conservative, a Christian, a

Methodist, a deacon, a girls 8th grade soft ball coach, an activist, a visionary, a Californian, an American, a leader and an entrepreneur. These are Bob's individual identities he has formed within his society. These identities are cumulative and the interaction within these roles creates the foundation for culture. Simply put, Bob cannot just be a father or just a coach; he is an amalgamation of all his identities. Each role will dominate his time and energy at any given moment as situations and stimulus dictate. Bob may need to react as a father to his children, but his other identities influence his behavior as a father. These behaviors over time will create patterns based on the laws and morality defined by the society in which he lives. These patterns of behaviors within a society, bounded by law, create the culture within that society.

The second form of identity is the salient identity. The salient identity is the predominant identity. This identity transcends all others and is often the result of a reaction to external stimulus. As a result of 9/11, Bob became an American, unified with his fellow countrymen in response to an attack. This is not to say that he is no longer a father, or a husband. In this instance, as a result of 9/11, his sense of patriotism moved to the forefront and became his salient identity. From that moment on, Bob's decision-making process was framed around his salient identity.

The human instinct is to make sense of things, to rationalize behavior so that it can be understood. To make sense of what Bob thinks and does as a member of his society, it is essential to understand what makes Bob, Bob. It is easier for other members of Bob's society to determine or understand his actions and reactions, since most societies have the same construct or context for behavior. If patterns of behavior fall within the "normal" or sensible context within the society, it would be classified as rational. If behavior falls outside of the "normal" context within that society, it is classified irrational. Since Bob is a softball coach, it would be

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rational that he brings bats, softballs and gloves to practice. If Bob brought footballs and helmets to practice, his team would deem this behavior irrational and try to make sense of this behavior.

In order to influence members of different cultures, it is imperative to understand the identities within that group that generate the culture. Additionally, determining the salient identity of that society is essential to understand the interactions and relationships between members of that society. What is rational to one society may be completely irrational to another. This is especially true of the military. The military conducts a wide range of operations throughout the world that require interaction with local societies. The successes of these operations are based on understanding the context of the culture. This can only be accomplished by observing and interacting with members of that society.

Strategic, Societal and Organizational Culture

Understanding culture is perhaps the most critical component of successful military operations that are conducted in the world today. However, culture is not limited to the interactions with host nations such as the case in Somalia, Haiti, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Understanding culture, both organizational and societal, has become essential for any military operation. "Cultural understanding is necessary both to defeat adversaries and to work successfully with allies."[10] Furthermore, interagency and coalition partnerships have become essential to effectively engage in the highly complex problem sets that faces the United States today. Each aspect of national power must be utilized effectively to achieve U.S. strategic objectives. The elements of soft and hard power must be interdependent, vice independent, to be effective. With the increased joint and interagency participation, each service and agency must overcome its own organizational culture to embrace the culture of dissimilar groups. "Various

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aspects of organizational culture exist on different levels or layers within an organization, and

they differ in terms of visibility and resistance to change."[11] Resistance to change is a common

obstacle in all agencies of the federal government. This resistance to change is detrimental in the

employment of hard and soft power to implement a national strategy.

There are three distinct levels of cultural interaction that face the military during

operations. These cultural levels establish awareness and ultimately understanding that is

required for mission success.   Figure 1 (below) illustrates these building blocks of complex

cultural interactions that are required for operational success. To be successful these blocks must

be built on the understanding of the previous level; otherwise, instabilities may exist and weaken

the structure. The foundation on which these blocks are constructed is the culture of the

individual service. Each military service has a unique mission and organizational culture that

must be understood and followed. The first level or block is the organizational culture of each

service as they relate of joint operations. As the necessity and frequency of joint operations

increase, the need for inter-service understanding and interoperability also increases. The second

level is the culture of the interagency and coalition forces during operations that require such

overlap. The third and perhaps most challenging is the culture of the host nation government and

local population in which operations are conducted. This last layer is most often underestimated

and overlooked due to the disparity of cultures and the time it takes to understand diverse
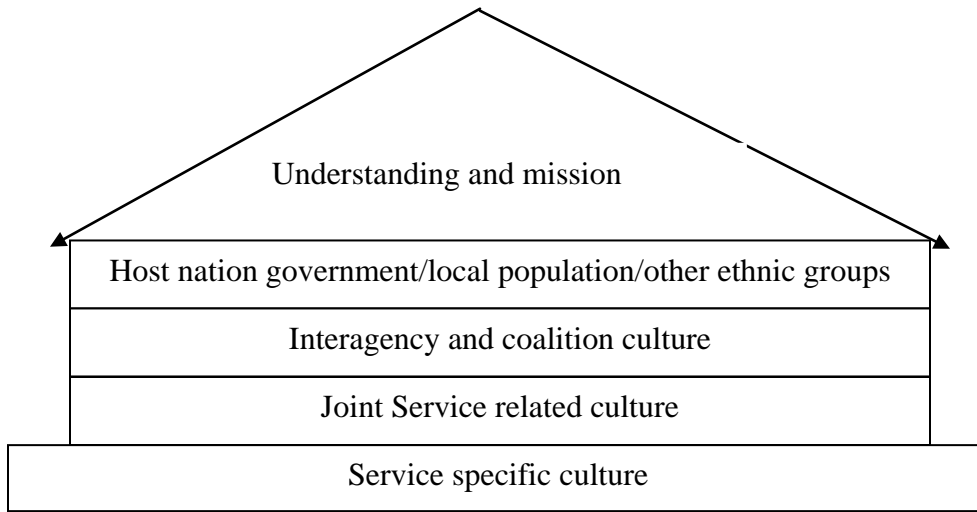
cultures.

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        Understanding and mission

Host nation government/local population/other ethnic groups

      Interagency and coalition culture

        Joint Service related culture

          Service specific culture
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Figure 1

Military culture

The projection of U.S. foreign policy is somewhat limited by presidential terms. Term

limits of U.S. presidents sometimes create an artificial timeline by which an administration's

objectives are achieved or constrained. Soft power elements of diplomacy and military

operations often take time to reach their goals. Objectives of U.S. foreign policy may take

months, decades, and in some cases, centuries. The Weinberger Doctrine advocates that the

United States should only use its military to protect vital interests that are threatened, and the use

of overwhelming force to defend it. However, the then security of State Madeleine Albright

challenged his views; "What's the point of having this superb military you're always talking

about *if* we can't use it?"[12] This simple statement illustrates the difference within the U.S. in

approaches to using military power. Regardless of the employment style, the fact remains that

there is a distinct relationship between the military, diplomacy and national policy. Clausewitz

sums this up this relationship with his paradoxical trinity; the people, the government and the military. Clausewitz went on to say that "war is merely the continuation of policy by other means."[13]

As mentioned earlier, the role of the U.S. military has shifted significantly in the last 60 years. This shift has taken place as a result of two predominant factors. First, warfare itself has changed. Gone are the days when large armies meet on open battlefields to attrite the opposing force by superior tactics, maneuver warfare, and technological advantages. Since the end of World War II, the U.S. has established itself as an extremely effective fighting force and the last remaining superpower. The military behemoth that the U.S. has become has actually changed the style of warfare it now conducts. Since the end of the Korean War, the U.S. has predominantly fought an insurgent or guerrilla-style war. These conflicts have resulted in several protracted wars with mixed results. This style of combat reduces the effectiveness of a superior force by using stealth, speed, and small troop numbers to combat the opponent's technological and military superiority. The result of these guerrilla tactics is to disrupt the superior force and ultimately cause a protracted engagement that denies the superior force a decisive victory.[14] Guerrilla style warfare has specifically adapted itself to target and mitigate a larger and technologically advanced opponent. The guerrilla movement does not have to win the war to be effective; all they have to do is just not lose.

The second driving factor that has molded operations of the U.S. military is economy of force. Budgetary constraints and technological advancements have steadily reduced the size of each branch within the military service. The U.S. military has gone from over 3 million active duty personnel in 1970 to 1.4 million in late 2011.[15] This is a 50% troop reduction in just 40 years with additional cuts projected over the next few years. "Military conflict has two

dimensions: winning wars and winning the peace. We excel in the first, but without an equal focus on the second, combat victories can be lost."[16]

Military culture has been defined for decades by reinforcing what was successful in conflict and avoiding what was disastrous. The U.S. Marine Corps has adopted this mentality into its ethos. Marine Corps history is taught to every Marine at every level. It is effective to imbed counts of bravery and gallantry into the mindset of all Marines. This becomes the culture of the Marine Corps. The Navy, Army and Air Force each have similar motives and traditions gleaned from the annals of history. The mission effectiveness and demands of each service create a culture unique, even competitive, to that service.

English Discussion Groups

In 2011, the Secretary of State outlined an increased focus of U.S. foreign policy toward Asia. This Asian focus combined with troop draw downs in Iraq and Afghanistan will continue to spread U.S. military units throughout the world. Bilateral and contingency operations will likely be the mainstay of the military for the foreseeable future throughout the world. It would be mutually beneficial for the U.S. military to engage these host nations in a cultural exchange. English discussion groups between the U.S. military and the host nation population will provide a cost effective means to leverage soft power to share and understand the cultural differences inherent within different cultures. Since English is becoming a universal language, the availability of English speaking nationals is sufficient to conduct discussion groups. A critical aspect in the success of English discussion groups is the interagency coordination between the military commanders on the ground and the embassy country teams. The country teams can assist in the organization of these groups as well as provide continuity in cases where short term

exercises occur. Upon completion of these discussion groups, After Action Reports (AAR) will provide a vital feedback mechanism between the military components and the embassy.

English Discussion Group Case Study – Djibouti Africa

In 2004 the U.S. Embassy in Djibouti started an English Discussion group with a local private school. The students of this school were being taught English as part of its field of studies. The purpose of this outreach program was twofold. First was the simple dialogue with the students to allow them to practice their English language skills. Secondly was the cultural exchange between the U.S. and Djibouti. These private schools varied from a developed building with running water and electricity to a dilapidated structure with dirt floors and box crates for chairs. The topics of the conversations were equally diverse and vetted by the students to the headmaster and ultimately decided on by the headmaster. Being a French colony, the predominant English speaking people in the country were either from the base or the U.S. embassy. During this time the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) was supporting Operation Enduring Freedom and participating in nation building projects within its Area of Responsibility (AOR) with the motto, "winning the hearts and minds." The J39 shop or Information Operations cell realized this opportunity to engage with the local population by participating in these English discussion groups. An initial team from Camp Lemonnier was vetted and selected to participate in partnership with the U.S. Embassy team. The team was comprised of three males a one female, from three military services, with both officer and enlisted representation.

The Public Affairs officer of the U.S. Embassy was spearheading this outreach program and was initially skeptical of the military's participation and interest in this program. Within a month the approval was given by the embassy to continue the discussion groups independently,

as well as expand to other private schools. The conversations were bold and candid. The Djiboutian culture was forward and inquisitive and did not share the similar taboo topics that Americans tend to avoid. Topics of conversation ranged from female circumcision to U.S. Policy in the region. The discussion groups lasted about two hours, beginning with a semi formal dialogue on the assigned topic. The military members would each give their opinion on the topic with relevant analogies and life experiences and the students would ask questions on the subject and share their experiences. For the second hour the camp members would be separated into groups to facilitate a more one on one dialogue. The second hour became a rapid fire question and answer session on any topic that came to mind with the focus on correcting any grammatical errors. These small group sessions were a challenging but revealed a deeper understanding of the Djiboutian and regional cultures. The shy or weak English speakers would not participate in the initial large group discussion but would open up in the smaller group setting and provide valuable context to the conversations. The students with weaker language skills would use fellow students to translate ideas to participate in the conversation.

The English discussion groups began with one school meeting one day a week. The school had an average of 20 students attending the pilot sessions with the military members. The program expanded within months to six schools meeting five to six times a week. At the end of four months nearly 300 students attend these discussion groups. The discussion groups became so popular that friends and relatives of some students came to observe and participate in the discussion. One meeting in a populated housing project had over 100 people in attendance. People were everywhere, sitting on roofs, leaning in windows, holes in walls and doorways. The questions continued for hours, for many this was the first interaction with an American. This one

simple discussion broke down many wild perceptions carried by Djiboutian's of the U.S. and Americans in general.

The cultural understanding gained from these discussion groups was astounding. Today, an increasing emphasis is being placed on cultural understanding and exchange but no training or culture awareness classes can compare to the simple interaction with the population. Prejudice, perception and misconception are barriers in any society but are especially true in the CJTF-HOA AOR. The people of Djibouti did not know or understand why the U.S. military was there. "Why does the U.S. want to take over Djibouti" was a common question from many of the students regardless of school. They had little understanding that a military was capable or willing to conduct these nation building projects. These students had a difficult time understanding a military that so quickly defeated the Iraqi army, could be in their country building schools and digging wells. Many students assumed the nation building efforts was propaganda and the true agenda in Djibouti was the same as Iraq.

By attending these discussion groups in civilian clothes the military members were able to assert themselves as people, not soldiers, and over time these barriers of perception and misconception began to unravel and drift away. Friendship bonds were created between the members of the camp and the students. A few Djiboutian students were able to travel in military convoys to attend school and medical clinic dedication projects. The students were able to see the impact of the Civil Affairs projects first hand in remote areas of the country. They were able to dialogue with their fellow countryman and observe, firsthand, the efforts of the camp. These students became powerful marketing tools in their communities. Word-of-mouth marketing is one of the most powerful tools of advertisement and is a natural byproduct of these types of discussion groups. The Djiboutian students became empowered thinkers with a newfound

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understanding of the American culture and ideal. These discussions sparked excitement and a greater understanding with the students. These students continued discussions long after the military members returned to camp; discussions about their family, their way of life, their country and Africa as a whole.[17]

The Way Ahead

In a budget-constrained environment, cost effective methods must be developed and utilized enable success on the battlefield. English discussion groups in military AOR's are a viable and cost effective method to develop cultural understanding. Partnership with the DoS and Civil Affairs teams, utilizing resident military manpower, will develop an increasing core of cultural experts within every COCOM.   This cultural expertise will be a valuable asset to both red and green cells during contingency planning. The scope and size of these discussion groups can be varied but the costs will be in terms of hours vice dollars.

The complex problems facing the U.S. in Afghanistan stem from both an irregular threat from an insurgent group and the cultural differences between the indigenous populations. An understanding of three principal aspects of culture is required to be effective in combating an irregular war with insurgent forces. The first aspect is the context or narrative and motivations of the adversary or insurgent. The next aspect is the local or national culture. The final and perhaps most difficult and overlooked aspect is the relationship between the insurgent group and the local population. A clear knowledge and understanding of these aspects of culture will facilitate solutions to complex problems inherent in both regular and irregular warfare. A direct dialogue and observation is requisite to cultural understanding in any society. Dialog leads to understanding; understanding leads to solutions. The knowledge of culture and the interactions

within a culture cannot be achieved by reading books alone. Though cultural training is and

integral foundation to military operations, true understanding of culture comes from direct

observation and dialogue.

English discussion groups provide a mechanism for the military to gain understanding in

each of these critical aspects. The emphasis in this process is discussion, not English. However,

there are several inherent benefits to the discussion

groups being in English. The greatest benefit is the

absence of a translator. The term "lost in translation" is

an understatement when using a translator. There are

many things that just don't translate; furthermore,

translators tend to summarize or paraphrase

conversations which may cause confusion or insult.

Since the English language has become a recognized

language in business and maritime travel it is ideal place

> *"What do you call a person who speaks two languages?"*
>
> *Bilingual*
> .
> *"What do you call a person who speaks three languages?"*
>
> *Trilingual.*
>
> *"What do you call a person who speaks one language?"*
>
> *An American.*

to begin. Unfortunate as it may be, Americans are less likely to learn another language then the

rest of the world is to learn English. "As the world's most valuable language, English is the

cornerstone upon which global business and global understanding are built. The reach of English

crosses conventional borders to extend to every corner of the globe, and its importance continues

to grow."[18]

The civilian population is a center of gravity in irregular conflict. Either they support the

U.S. Operations and ultimately the local government or they do not. For a counterinsurgency to

succeed, the will of the people must support the appointed government and oppose the insurgent

forces. These English discussion groups target this center of gravity and enable the military a

direct insight into the will of the people. The most difficult obstacle in the path of communication is prejudice, perception and misconception. Strategic Communication and media coverage are effective but don't target the individual, they target the masses. This mass media, especially U.S. media, is often perceived as propaganda. The cultural exchange through English discussion groups can reinforce strategic objectives through tactical interactions.

Conclusion

The world is continually changing as a result of the constant pull of globalization. Never before has the world been so interconnected. Economies, religions and cultures link together and interact on each other, causing new partnerships to form and adversaries to overcome. National interests must change in response to these links both domestically and internationally. Globalization requires a deeper understanding of these influences and motivations that all stem from culture. Understanding and embracing culture is the key to facilitate partnerships throughout the world. The understanding, gained from English discussion groups, will not only help train units in theater to be more culturally aware but this understanding will filter up to senior level commanders with alternative options in campaign plans that could be the difference between protracted conflict or a thriving partnership. English discussion groups provide a cost effective, unfettered view into the American culture and ideal. The prejudice, perceptions and stereotypes of culture can be addressed, discussed and understood. English discussion groups facilitate discussions with the local population that will build trust with the U.S. military and ultimately, in a COIN style conflict, build trust and support for the local government. The target audience of any insurgency or counterinsurgency is the local population. Success or failure is predicated on the support of the local population and the will of the people. The military is missing a golden opportunity to target and influence the center of gravity of any insurgency – the

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people. English discussion groups will not be the ultimate success to COIN but will create an

effective tool for the COIN toolbox. If America is to decline as a nation it will not be because of

its culture or economy, it will be because of its ignorance.

End Notes

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